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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/FO, SA/A, S/CR, EUR/RPM
NSC FOR HARRIMAN
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SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF TRIBAL WARLORD IN HERAT PROVINCE

KABUL 00005197 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) Regional Pashtun warlord Amunallah Khan, his son and many others in his convoy were killed in an armed attack which took place on the road between Shindand and Zir Kuh in southern Herat Province on October 22. Reprisal attacks by his followers took place in the general Zir Kuh area the same day. The initial attack and its reprisal will affect Pashtun tribal relationships in the area, and could impact on provincial security.

THE OCT 22 ATTACK

2. (SBU) On Oct 22, 2006 a convoy of 2 vehicles carrying Amanullah Khan, family members and an armed escort suffered an RPG attack followed by small arms fire close to Gardana and Larga villages on the road from Shindand to Zir Kuh. Amanullah Khan, his son and most of the entourage were killed on the spot. After news of the attack spread, Amanullah Khan's Noorzai (Pashtun) tribesmen made a reprisal attack on Barakzai (Pashtun) tribesmen loyal to Arbab Bashir. In the ensuing conflict, two helicopters from the ANA base at Shindand were mobilized, causing the crowd to disperse. Herat officials have announced that over two hundred and fifty troops from ANA and ANP units were mobilized to quell the violence. A delegation of senior GOA officials, headed by Wolesi Jirga Deputy Speaker Aref Noorzai (who was also sent to Shindand in 2004 to help bring an end to district conflict and to escort Amanullah Khan back to house arrest in Kabul) has left Kabul for Shindand.

OLD FEUDS

2. (SBU) The Pashtun Amanullah Khan was a long time bitter opponent of Herat's Tajik ex-Governor (and now Minister of Water and Energy) Ismail Khan, and their rivalry in the region sparked a major conflict in 2004. Ismail Khan was originally from Shindand, and their animosity went back many years. Amanullah Khan was also reputedly a narcotics-trafficker, and was accused by officials in Herat as being a Taliban commander who gave refuge to many

ex-Taliban fighters after the collapse of the Taliban regime. Although the Shindand District was administratively part of Herat Province, Amanullah Khan had great power in the area and the district was divided into Herat-controlled and Amanullah Khan-controlled sectors, separated by a no-man's land. Full scale hostilities erupted in 2004, and Amanullah Khan was brought to Kabul and placed under house arrest for several months until the area quieted down.

TRIBAL HOSTILITIES

13. (SBU) The October 22 confrontation between Amanullah Khan's forces and those of Arbab Bashir was not the first. In August, 2006 Amanullah Khan's vehicle was attacked en route to a DIAG meeting in Herat. Two men riding a motorcycle threw a hand grenade into the vehicle, but Amanullah Khan was only slightly injured. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack in August, but local speculation is that Arbab Basir could have been behind this incident. He and Amanullah Khan were engaged in a major land dispute near the Iranian border. In early October, Basir was in his vehicle with his older son and several companions en route to Shindand when their vehicle was ambushed by an armed group. Basir was instantly killed and his elder son seriously injured during this ambush. The consensus was that this was Amanullah Khan's doing.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) We are consulting with ISAF to be sure they are taking appropriate measures to ensure security. The attack and reprisal impact on conditions in the southern portion of Herat province and possibly Herat itself. The removal of Amanullah Khan, who was often accused of close Taliban ties, could lead Taliban sympathizers and other extremist elements to become bolder, perhaps in tandem with

KABUL 00005197 002.2 OF 002

Iran, or alone. The area Amanullah Khan controlled touches the Iran-Afghan border. At a minimum, the incident has the potential to escalate and trigger more factional conflict within the province's Pashtun tribes. There could also be a spill-over effect on neighboring Farah Province, which has large Noorzai and Barakzai populations. For several years, the Herat Provincial government has had very limited reach in the large area controlled by Amanullah Khan, and its ability to step in to fill the vacuum left by his death will be a serious challenge.

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